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The CBRN Country that came in from the Cold

Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Lazarevic presented to *CBRNe World* details on Serbia's current and future plans for CBRN defence

There is a direct correlation between those countries that have used, or suffered, CBRN weapons and modern competence. The UK, and, because of the special connections, Canada and Australia, Germany, the US, France and Italy all have their roots in their chemical weapon experience – their experience of the offensive side of the game allowed them to develop their defensive capability faster. Serbia is a late entrant into the same field. Ever since the late 1950s Yugoslavia, as was, was producing chemical agents in Mostar, while Croatia and Montenegro also have some of this legacy. Serbia, like the Czech Republic, seemed to inherit the lion's share of CBRN when their respective countries were created. Unlike the Czech Republic, however, Serbia did not see independence as a time to stop its involvement in any offensive weapons programmes, instead,

it is suggested the Allied air campaigns in 1999 provided the full stop.

Yet the Serbian Republic is a very different country than it was in 1999. It has worked hard to be recognised as a potential EU member, while it became a Partnership for Peace country within Nato in 1996 and it wasn't until the arrest and removal to the Hague of Radovan Karadzic in July 2008 that there was an increase in international warmth towards Serbia. Serbia should be a good port of call for any CBRN nation interested in furthering its own defence, if only in the beating swords into ploughshares mould – but there is also a lot of experience that Serbia has that is useful. Serbia is now a fully signed-up member to the CWC (and more on their relationship with OPCW later) and, as such, has dismantled all its toxic production plants, it has decontaminated the south of Serbia that

was contaminated with depleted Uranium rounds (DU) and it has also gone through a transformational process for its armed forces.

It is the legacy of Serbia's NBC experience that makes it an interesting partner, however. The NBC Training Centre at Krusevac is now being offered to other nations as a training facility and has aspirations to become the Regional Chemical Defence Training Centre for all south-eastern European countries. Krusevac already trains to a high standard its own NBC officers and soldiers, it has its own radiological and chemical lab, the ability to do modular courses and there is also a 96-hectare training facility with the ability to do limited live-agent training. Serbia has already offered the facility to OPCW and personnel from North African countries for training purposes and been accepted. Serbia is expected to provide

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three training courses for OPCW inspectors and two courses for the North African states. The latter courses are provided under OPCW auspices, funded by the EU, and are an attempt to provide some form of training for North African first responders to be able to deal with a CBRN attack on their homeland.

This outreach is not the only international activity that Serbian NBC forces are involved in. As well as attending the Joint CBRN Commanders and Commandants Conference in Liberec in October 2008, Serbian CBRN soldiers have travelled to Rieti and Civitavecchia (Italy), Romania and have been visited by the Germans, US, Romanians and OPCW. It is all part of the modernisation programme, to share the experience and training of other nations and to try and promote the experience that Serbia has. This modernisation is not just on the world stage, they are also practising it closer to home. Like many comparable forces they are currently drawing down on numbers and the amount of NBC defence battalions is being cut to two – the Training Centre and the 246 NBC Defence Battalion. Serbia has also disbanded NBC defence as a separate

arm, incorporating it as a general purpose service and removing the administrative chain of command. What is left might be smaller, but investment has been poured in to improve capabilities. So they have invested in new chemical detectors – LCD, CAM2 and Raid M – new radiac detectors – SOR/R, AN/PDR77, Digi Dart MCA and RDS200; they are also looking to update their recce vehicles and decon capability.

One different capability that the Serbians have is the ability to train with less-than-lethal devices – particularly non-lethal chemical weapons, such as CS, CR and OC. As opposed to many countries that disdain research in this, perhaps because of Serbia's history with agents such as BZ, they have an active programme looking at new effects for temporary disablement, new (non-prohibited) chemicals for disablement and new delivery devices – such as a multi-calibre chemical-device launcher, their 'Non Lethal NBC Gas Gun.' The Training Centre regularly trains Serbian police in the use of such devices and is keen to offer itself to other nations that have a similar need.

Disregarding the politics of the situation, Serbia certainly has a need for

a strong CBRN defence. Relations between Serbia and Kosovo are not good, and Kosovo is not too far from "failed state" status and, with means and the will, a non-conventional attack would not be out of the question. With this in mind the Training Centre has undertaken to train the civilian forces and also to integrate military forces into the civilian structure to help risk assess home industry. The Training Centre is looking to expand and has asked the EU, and other interested states, for funding. The figures are fairly small – €90,000 for the construction and refurbishment of accommodation – down to €10,000 for modernisation of the labs, but there will be an opportunity missed if the investment isn't there. Nato and the EU stands a good chance of reaping some benefits out of the old offensive programme. The levels of training, experience and research, are still there – but as the individuals age so does the opportunity. The improvement in quality of equipment and training that has been invested will only be of benefit to Europe, and potentially to the wider world through the OPCW. As long as the political thaw continues, it will be nice to see Serbia welcomed back into the warm.



Serbia is reaching out to countries such as America, Romania and the Germans ©Serbian MoD

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